



Endless Opportunities

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INCORPORATION/CONSOLIDATION - Why Us, Why Now?

By County Administrator Steve Szablewski and Management Director Todd Glover

Columbia County needs to think of incorporation and consolidation as a 2-part action that could have an extremely positive impact on the County now and for generations to come. The Board of Commissioners feels that this is a unique time to accomplish one of its most important projects – to ensure the government of Columbia County will be streamlined and able to profit from opportunities allowed by State law for consolidated governments. Four counties in Georgia have established this type of unified government, and many more are investigating the potential for themselves.



Steve Szablewski

Incorporation (i.e., a city is formed) occurs when citizens want services provided beyond minimum services normally available from a county. Consolidation is the merging of a county government

Todd Glover

with one or more municipal governments (i.e., cities) in a metropolitan area to create a single, unified governmental unit. Unlike many Georgia Counties which have a municipal government providing urban services to a large portion of the county's population, the Columbia County government is the major service provider in our County. Since more than 90% of the County's population is in the unincorporated area outside the city limits of both Grovetown and Harlem, the vast majority of all local governmental services are provided by the County government. For example, of the 63 governmental services identified in the Service Delivery Strategy developed between Columbia County and the Cities of Grovetown and Harlem, Columbia County participates directly in all the services. In fact, 28 of the services are provided solely by the County for the entire population including the Cities of Grovetown and Harlem.

In 1991 and 1995 studies, it was recommended that the County consolidate with either one or both of the two Cities (i.e., Grovetown and Harlem) and have a county-wide fire service. Both Cities declined. Over the years, several Commissions have been interested in incorporation and consolidation because the Cities remain uninterested in consolidation, but were limited by the State law that required a 3-mile buffer between cities. Because of a change in the state law (i.e., the 3-mile buffer was removed) this year, Columbia County now has the unique opportunity to create a city in the more populated area of the County and then instantly consolidating it with the entire unincorporated area of the county. This would make us the 7th largest city in Georgia. But this must be done by assistance from our Legislative Delegation to allow you, the voters of the County, to make the final decision.

The real question is "Why?" The following is a list of eight positive outcomes of consolidation for Columbia County:

1. Puts our name on the map – For economic development, we need a name that will be on maps and road signage.
2. Nothing changes – No additional layer of government.
3. Additional revenue from franchise fees – The \$5 million from annual franchise fees could be directed to specific infrastructure projects such as transportation, stormwater, and recreation without having a tax increase. It must be noted that natural gas and telephone customers would probably see a 3% increase in their bills as the utilities "pass through" this franchise fee.
4. Being both a city and a county – State law has certain restrictions on counties that it does not apply to cities. It would be advantageous to "play both sides of the street."
5. Prevents another city from forming and providing duplicative and conflicting services.
6. Federal Grants – As a city, we would be eligible for more Federal grants
7. Economies of scale – We need to keep our county as cost-efficient as possible.
8. Maintain community identity – The various communities would keep their unique character and names.

In their work on the four consolidated governments in Georgia, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia identified potential negatives associated with the formation of a consolidated government. Since most of these negatives or "downsides" associated with the creation of a consolidated government concern the problem of merging an existing city and county government, they do not really apply to the Columbia County initiative. No merger of two governments will be required since the existing County government will assume the responsibility of the consolidated government. There would be, however, minor costs for legal fees and staff time to accomplish this consolidation.

Although Grovetown and Harlem which comprise less than nine percent of the County's population feel that a better identity for the County helps them as well, they are concerned that consolidation would:

- Prevent future land area growth in their Cities
- Negatively impact LOST and SPLOST negotiations
- Make it more difficult to change municipal boundaries
- Impact water lines outside of their city limits

Meetings with City officials will be held to resolve their concerns about the consolidated government proposal.

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Consolidation continued . . .

At this point in time, we have a unique opportunity to incorporate (i.e., create a city) in the more populated area of the County and then instantly consolidate that city into the County and creating a single, consolidated government. The two currently incorporated areas – Grovetown and Harlem – would remain distinct cities as they prefer.

Obviously, Columbia County is blessed with great success through hard work and integrity, but consolidation is equal to or greater in importance than all these achievements and will have a profoundly positive impact for generations to come.

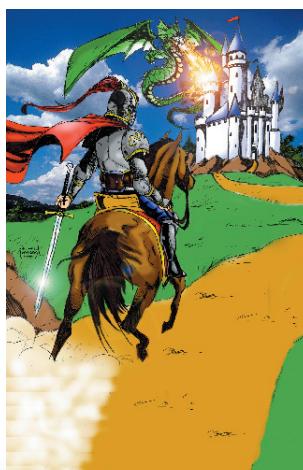
Columbia County CERT Team Deployment to Mississippi



Standing from left: John Tucker, Margaret Williams, Jan DeAsis, Susan Hayden, Stephanie McWhorter, Joe Matosian, Ed Campbell, and KauVonda Amos (Mississippi EMA CERT Program Manager). **Kneeling from left:** John Harlan, Gwen Wood, Lorraine Lynch, Jill Harpe, Bob Crutchfield, and Kathryn Crutchfield

Columbia County currently has 135 certified CERT members and two classes have been scheduled to train an additional 70 Columbia County citizens. (Schedules are posted on the Columbia County Website at www.columbiacountyga.gov. You must be a Columbia County resident 18 or older to participate.)

Columbia County Art & Renaissance Festival



The seventh annual Columbia County Art & Renaissance Festival will be held October 14-16, 2005 at Savannah Rapids Pavilion.

The festival will open with the art show awards reception on Friday, October 14th from 7-10 PM. Forty local and regional artists will contend for a \$3,200 purse in seven art categories. The reception will also feature a silent auction, live entertainment, and refreshments. Reception tickets are \$10 and available by contacting Columbia County Community Events at 706-868-3484. Anyone dressed in Renaissance costume will receive two drink tickets, compliments of Columbia County Arts, Inc.

Festivities continue Saturday, October 15th from 10 AM – 5 PM and Sunday, October 16th from 1-5 PM. Activities include Renaissance demonstrations by the Society of Creative Anachronism, live entertainment, children's games, arts and craft vendors, food and more.

Festival admission is free, thanks to the generous support of our partners: Taylor Auto Group, Rhodes Financial Services, Knology, Club Car, Columbia County News-Times, Georgia Power, Clear Channel CSRA and WBAU-Augusta's WB 23. For additional information, contact Columbia County Community Events at 706-868-3484 or visit www.columbiacountyga.gov.

Flu Shots

The Columbia County Health Department will have Influenza vaccine available to the high-risk public on the following dates and times, pending vaccine availability. Beginning October 24, 2005, all persons can get a flu shot. Personal care homes need to bring their residents to this clinic for vaccines.

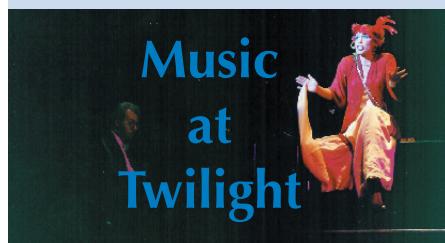
Dates: October 5, 6, 7 Time: 10 AM until 3 PM

Location: Evans Government Center Auditorium Building A

Cost: Influenza \$20.00 per shot (pneumococcal vaccine \$14.81 per shot if meets high risk guidelines for state supplied vaccine (for 2 years old and older)

High Risk Criteria:

- People aged 65 years and older with and without chronic health conditions
- Residents of long-term care facilities
- People aged 2-64 years with chronic health conditions
- Children aged 6-23 months
- Pregnant women
- Health-care personnel who provide direct patient care
- Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children less than 6 months of age



The Augusta Opera will be giving a free concert on October 22nd at 6:00 PM in front of the Justice Center on Ronald Reagan Drive. This will be a marvelous opportunity for young

and old alike to bring a chair or a blanket and be entertained by professional opera and Broadway artists. Mark D. Flint, Artist Director of the Augusta Opera, will be conducting members of the Augusta Symphony and Pilar Cragan, Terence Murphy, Olindo Marseglia, and Columbia County's own professional opera star, Tonya Currier, will be featured.

Halloween Celebration

Thursday, October 27, 5:30-8:30 PM

Patriots Park Gymnasium



Pre-carved pumpkin contest and costume contest for children 3-12 years old as well as trick-or-treating in a safe environment! Free with a canned food donation. For more information call 706-868-3484 or go to our website at www.columbiacountyga.gov.